THE US RESPONSE TO THE DISPLACEMENT OF IRAQIS SINCE 2003

by

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ABSTRACT

As the US completes its military withdrawal from Iraq, the Obama Administration's stated policy goals are to promote security, stability and prosperity in Iraq, help it emerge as a force for stability and moderation in the region, transition responsibility for security to the Iraqis and cultivate an enduring relationship with Iraq based on mutual interests and respect. However, almost all of these goals are complicated by the fact that around 3.5 million Iraqis are still displaced, around 2 million internally and the rest in neighboring countries. The US has recognized that the displacement of Iraqis has a direct impact on its goals in Iraq, but, as this study demonstrates, its response to the displacement problem suggests that it has either not grasped, or is unwilling to acknowledge, the scale of the problem. This response has been determined primarily by politics and security concerns, and while the US has helped provide much needed humanitarian relief to displaced Iraqis, it has treated their displacement as a purely humanitarian problem while neglecting its other aspects. An overemphasis on the humanitarian aspects of displacement has prevented the US from developing a more comprehensive response that could both help it achieve its goals in Iraq and add to the likelihood that Iraq will eventually emerge as a prosperous stable democracy.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

As the US completes its military withdrawal from Iraq, the Obama Administration's stated policy goals are to promote security, stability and prosperity in Iraq, help it emerge as a force for stability and moderation in the region, transition responsibility for security to the Iraqis and cultivate an enduring relationship with Iraq based on mutual interests and respect.[1] However, almost all of these goals are complicated by the mass displacement of Iraqis. In its latest displacement figures for Iraq (February 2011), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) lists its total "population of concern" as 3,565,375. This number includes refugees—those Iraqis who have the fled the country—as well as internally displaced people (IDPs).[2] Although security has improved significantly since Iraqis began fleeing their homes in the thousands in mid-2006, this improvement has not been reflected by any marked decrease in the total number of displaced Iraqis. While the numbers of newly displaced are low, so are the numbers of returnees because most displaced Iraqis are not yet convinced that their country is safe enough for them to return.[3] Moreover, it is not uncommon for those

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[1] James F. Jeffrey, "The Challenging Transition to a Civilian Mission," Statement to the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee, Washington, D.C., February 1, 2011, www.state.gov.

[2] UNHCR, *Country Operations Profile: Iraq*, April 2011, www.unhcr.org.

[3] UNHCR, *Country Operations Profile: Iraq*; Joseph Sassoon, *The Iraqi Refugees: The New Crisis in the Middle East* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2009), 158.

who do return soon to leave again in order to escape the continuing violence, seek employment opportunities outside Iraq, or to find new homes because theirs have been occupied or destroyed during their absence.[4]

The displacement of almost 4 million Iraqis has resulted mainly from the sectarian violence set off by the bombing of the al-'Askariyya mosque in February 2006, but the Iraqi government's inability to deliver basic services and the lack of economic opportunities have also contributed. Most Iraqi refugees are living in Jordan and Syria, which do not grant them "official" refugee status, resulting in populations of what Géraldine Chatelard has called "invisible migrants" because they can neither return to Iraq nor integrate into the local populations.[5] While most Iraqis are not allowed to work in Jordan and Syria, they can receive healthcare in public clinics and their children can attend public schools, with the result that their presence has put severe burdens on the social services of these countries. They have also contributed to water shortages and are perceived as being the cause of price increases, resulting in resentment among the local populations and creating the potential for instability.[6] On the other hand, despite expectations to the contrary, Iraqi refugees have not exported their country's sectarian violence,[7] although displacement can reinforce sectarian identities, as Iraqi refugees find

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[4] John Leland, "Iraq's Troubles Drive out Refugees Who Came Back," *The New York Times*, Nov. 26, 2010; Sassoon, 158-160.

[5] Géraldine Chatelard, *Jordan as a Transit Country: Semi-Protectionist Immigration Policies and their Effects on Iraqi Forced Migrants*, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, European University Institute, Working Paper no. 61, August 2002, 6.

[6] International Crisis Group (ICG), *Failed Responsibility: Iraqi Refugees in Syria, Jordan and Lebanon*, Middle East Report no. 77, July 10, 2008, 12-3, 23-4; Sassoon, 46-51, 75-8. Despite the perception among host populations that Iraqis exacerbate existing economic problems, Sassoon has shown that at least in Jordan the net economic impact of the influx of Iraqis has been positive.

[7] ICG, 6; Reinoud Leenders, "Getting the 'Ladder of Options' Right—The Illusive and Real Security Fallout of the Iraq Refugee Crisis," *Middle East Institute*, Sept. 2010.

support among members of their own sect, and tend to live in sectarian communities,[8] creating fears among host governments that they will eventually enflame sectarian tensions.[9] Internal displacement has had similar destabilizing effects on Iraq,[10] which can hardly emerge as a force for stability and moderation in the region when significant numbers of its population remain displaced.

Displacement also hinders the process of economic development in Iraq. Significant numbers of its professional class have fled the country, resulting in a brain drain, which complicates the task of growing Iraq's economy. Reconstruction projects suffer from a lack of skilled workers and the quality of higher education and healthcare has decreased in part because so many academics and doctors have fled the country. Because Iraqi universities lack both the teachers and the resources to train new professionals properly, the future graduates of these universities are unlikely to have the qualifications necessary to fill the gaps left by the flight of Iraq's middle class.[11] Although the Obama Administration's official policy statements on Iraq emphasize promoting stability and prosperity rather than democracy, one hopes that it is also committed to help strengthen Iraq's democratic institutions, but this, too, is complicated by the absence of a numerically significant middle class. Promoting prosperity and protecting democracy both depend at least in part on creating incentives for Iraqi refugees to return.

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[8] ICG, 5-6, Chatelard, 6.

[9] ICG, 11.

[10] Olga Oliker, Audra K. Grant, Dalia Dassa Kaye, *The Impact of U.S. Military Drawdown in Iraq on Displaced and Other Vulnerable Populations*, Occasional Paper, Rand: National Defense Institute, 2010, 12.

[11] Sassoon, 129-150.

If the US hopes to cultivate an enduring relationship based on mutual interests and respect with a *democratic* Iraq, it cannot ignore the humanitarian aspects of displacement either. Perceived indifference to the plight of Iraqi refugees would add to the resentment many Iraqis already feel toward the US and thus further complicate their country's relations with it.[12]

Because displacement has a direct impact on America's stated goals in Iraq, the US has a clear interest in seeing the problem resolved, and it has recognized, albeit reluctantly and belatedly, that the displacement of Iraqis is not a problem it can ignore. Its response, however, suggests that the US has either not grasped, or is unwilling to acknowledge, the scale of the problem.

US Policy Toward Displaced Populations

The Obama Administration's report on proposed refugee admissions for fiscal year 2011, which discusses refugee policy in addition to proposing refugee admissions, emphasizes that "the United States actively supports efforts to provide protection, assistance and durable solutions to refugees, as these measures meet both our humanitarian objectives and our foreign policy and national security interests."[13] Durable solutions include three basic options: voluntary repatriation, local integration in countries of asylum, and third-country resettlement. The international community's preferred solution is voluntary repatriation, but when this is not possible, local integration is the next best option. Third-country resettlement is considered only when the other

[12] Oliker, et al., 13.

[13] US Department of State, US Department of Homeland Security, US Department of Health and Human Services, *Proposed Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2011,* Oct. 2010, 1.

alternatives are not viable. The US assists in repatriation and local integration by funding UNHCR and NGOs that provide relief to displaced populations, and it uses the US Refugee Assistance Program (USRAP) to help those with no other options to resettle in the US.[14]

The US thus recognizes that assisting displaced populations serves its interests, and although official policy statements regarding refugees and IDPs emphasize humanitarian goals, it is clear that the US response to displacement is driven primarily by politics. The acknowledgement that helping displaced populations meets foreign policy interests provides some indication of the politics informing US refugee policy. During the Cold War, refugee assistance was much more overtly political, as the US and other Western powers tended to use the international refugee protection regime as a pawn in their ideological struggle with the Soviet Union and with Communism in general. In its effort to demonstrate the superiority of capitalism and liberal democracy, the US was much more willing to resettle refugees from Communist regimes than from other parts of the world.[15] Details about the current politics surrounding US refugee policy can be gleaned from the lists of refugees categorized as "of special concern to the United States," the only refugees eligible to apply for resettlement through USRAP.[16] For example, Cuban asylum seekers have been eligible for such resettlement for several decades, whereas Iraqis did not appear as a priority in US policy documents until late 2008, more than two years after the height of the sectarian violence that caused millions

[14] Ibid., 1-2.

[15] Gil Loescher, Alexander Betts, and James Milner, *The United High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR): The Politics and Practice of Refugee Protection into the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 14-46.

[16] Ibid., 1-2.

to flee their homes.[17] While few would argue that the Castro regime respects human rights, it is undeniable that throughout 2006, Iraqis had a greater need for humanitarian assistance than Cubans. However, it is also true that while the US was happy to draw attention to the failures of the Castro regime that might cause Cubans to seek asylum in the US, it was not so eager to acknowledge the same failures in Iraq.

As this study will demonstrate, the US response to the displacement of Iraqis since 2003 has been determined primarily by politics and security concerns. In the first few months after Saddam Hussein was overthrown, Iraqis who had been displaced before 2003 began returning, and the US was eager to draw attention to this fact because it was an indication that the US had created the necessary conditions for the voluntarily repatriation of Iraqi refugees, that Iraqis supported America's vision for a new Iraq and that they had confidence in their country's future. As the situation in Iraq deteriorated and the trend of repatriations reversed, the US continued to insist that repatriation was possible. It began acknowledging that repatriations were now vastly outnumbered by new displacements only when it became more politically damaging to ignore the problem than to acknowledge it.

Responding to the problem involved recognizing that the US had a special obligation to assist the displaced Iraqis who had became targets of violence because they had worked with or helped the US in some way. The obvious solution was resettlement in the US, but this process was complicated by the new immigration rules implemented after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. American's legitimate security concerns thus made it difficult for it to fulfill its moral obligation toward displaced Iraqis.

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[17] US Department of State, US Department of Homeland Security, US Department of Health and Human Services, *Proposed Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2011,* Oct. 2008, 11. For a comparison, see the reports from 2003 to 2007.

When the US finally acknowledged the severity of the displacement problem, it responded by providing humanitarian assistance to Iraqi refugees and IDPs. However, it has overemphasized the humanitarian dimensions of the problem while neglecting its other aspects. Granted, the problem is extremely complex, and it is not entirely clear how much more the US could actually do to help resolve it, but, as the authors of a Rand Corporation study on the impact of the military drawdown have argued, recognizing it as "a long-term development challenge for Iraq and the region" would be an important step forward.[18]

Terminology

A variety of terms are used to describe displaced populations, and because they are often used interchangeably, they can create confusion. The terms most relevant to this study are "refugee," "asylum-seeker" and "internally-displaced people." The main difference is that while refugees and asylum-seekers have crossed international borders, internally-displaced people have not. As defined by the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees, a refugee is one who "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country."[19] An asylum-seeker has fled his or her home country and is awaiting official recognition of refugee status.[20]

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[18] Olga Oliker, Audra K. Grant, Dalia Dassa Kaye, *The Impact of U.S. Military Drawdown in Iraq on Displaced and Other Vulnerable Populations: Analysis and Recommendations*, Rand: National Defense Institute, 2010, 20.

[19] UNHCR, "Refugees," 2001-2011, http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49c3646c125.html.

[20] UNHCR, "Asylum-Seekers," 2001-2011, http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49c3646c137.html.

Internally-displaced people (IDPs) have fled their homes to escape violence or persecution but have not crossed an international border.[21] While both refugees and asylum-seekers are eligible for international protection, IDPs are still legally under the protection of their own governments, even if these governments have caused their displacement.[22]

Literature Review

The published work on the displacement of Iraqis since 2003 focuses mainly on the humanitarian concerns surrounding the displaced, and their impact on Iraq and its neighbors. While most of these works criticize the US response to displacement, none contains a comprehensive analysis of the development of this response since 2003.

To date, only one book has been published on the displacement of Iraqis since 2003, Sassoon's *The Iraqi Refugees*, which contains a short section on the U.S. response, arguing that the US was slow to acknowledge the problem because "admitting that these people were fleeing because of the total chaos would be to admit failure of the US policy in Iraq."[23] Sassoon notes that another factor affecting this policy was the general belief that displacement was not a crisis and was not triggered by the actions of the US. American avoidance of the issue was particularly harmful for those Iraqis who had worked for the US and then had to flee their homes because they were accused of colluding with the enemy.[24] Sassoon briefly traces the evolution of the US response,

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[21] UNHCR, "Internally-Displaced People," 2001-2011, http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49c3646c146.html.

[22] UNHCR, "Internally-Displaced People."

[23] Sassoon, 110.

[24] Sassoon, 112.

noting that after pressure from Congress, the media and the international community, the Bush Administration gradually came to acknowledge the extent of the displacement problem, allocated more funds to NGOs and international organizations working to assist refugees and IDPs, and began admitting more Iraqis into the US.[25]

While arguing that the US response has been inadequate, Chantal Berman acknowledges that it has been easier for displaced Iraqis to resettle in the US since 2007 as a result of the Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) program created for displaced Iraqis who have worked for the US and the new P2 category of visas designed for Iraqis of "special humanitarian concern." However, she adds that only a small percentage of displaced Iraqis qualify for these special visas.[26] Like Sassoon, Elizabeth Ferris draws attention to America's initial reluctance to acknowledge the problem and also highlights the ways in which the US has assisted displaced Iraqis since 2007.[27]

The Brookings Institution, Human Rights Watch and the International Crisis Group have all published studies based on extensive field work among displaced Iraqis, which highlight the humanitarian concerns surrounding displacement and its impact on Iraq and its neighbors while also criticizing the US response to displacement.[28] Their criticisms echo those made by Sassoon, Berman, and Ferris, and they note that while its response is still inadequate, the US has belatedly recognized the problem and devoted more resources to assisting displaced Iraqis. Harriet Dodd connects American

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[25] Sassoon, 110-112.

[26] Chantal Berman, "An Uncommon Burden: Aid, Resettlement, and Refugee Policy in Syria," *Middle East Institute*, Dec. 2010, 12-3.

[27] Elizabeth Ferris, *The Looming Crisis: Displacement and Security in Iraq*, The Brookings Institution, Aug. 2008, 17-21.

[28] Ashraf al-Khalidi, Sophia Hoffman and Victor Tanner, *Iraqi Refugees in the Syrian Arab Republic: A Field-Based Snapshot*, The Brookings Institute, June 2007, www.brookings.edu; Human Rights Watch, *The Silent Treatment: Fleeing Iraq, Surviving in Jordan,* 18/10(E), (November 2006); ICG.

recognition of the problem with the 2006 mid-term elections, noting that the war in Iraq was central to this election and that "the exposure of the size of the [displacement] problem forced the Administration to admit to an increasingly hostile public at home that their war was affecting innocent lives in ways that were deeply unpopular."[29]

A 2010 Rand Corporation study sponsored by the Secretary of Defense examines the impact of the military drawdown on displaced and other vulnerable populations. The study notes that the US has recognized that as it withdraws troops from Iraq its capacity to assist displaced Iraqis who have worked for the US will decrease. It is thus developing a database of Iraqis eligible for resettlement in the US to simplify the application process.[30] The study also emphasizes that long-term displacement is detrimental to U.S. interests in Iraq and the region as a whole because it creates security concerns, contributes to instability, hinders economic development and raises serious humanitarian concerns.[31]

In a 2010 study on the US response to internal displacement throughout the world, Roberta Cohen and Dawn Calabia identify improvements to this response over the past ten years as well as several perceived flaws, several of which apply equally to American policy toward the internal displacement of Iraqis. While acknowledging that the US adopted a specific USAID policy for IDPs in 2004 and that the State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration now devotes more attention to IDPs, they

[29] Harriet Dodd, "Iraqi Refugees in Jordan: The Challenges of Providing Assistance in an Opaque Environment," *Middle East Institute*, Dec. 2010.

[30] Oliker, et al., 6.

[31] Oliker, et al, 12-14.

indicate that implementation of IDP policy is irregular, initiatives to assist IDPs are underfunded, and insufficient attention is paid to the reintegration of IDPs.[32]

Without criticizing the US response directly, Géraldine Chatelard's work on the regional effects of displacement reveals some of its perceived failures. In several of her articles, she examines the ways in which displaced Iraqis use Jordan as a transit point for potential resettlement in the US and Europe and shows how displacement contributes to organized crime as Iraqis sometimes rely on human traffickers to cross borders and document forgers to acquire passports and other necessary papers.[33] One reason Jordan has become a transit point is because of its policy toward displaced Iraqis, which allows them to stay while preventing them from integrating into Jordanian society. Chatelard argues that the goal of this policy is to create "incentives to transit," through which Jordan hopes to encourage the US and other countries to share the burden of hosting displaced Iraqis. Her work thus contains the implied criticism that the US has placed an unfair burden on Jordan as a result of its inadequate response to the displacement of Iraqis and has encouraged it to adopt a policy that has potentially destabilizing effects.

The three basic points that emerge from this literature review are that initially the US ignored the displacement problem, that its response has improved significantly since mid-2006 and that despite improvements, this response remains inadequate. What is

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[32] Roberta Cohen and Dawn Calabia, "Improving the US Response to Internal Displacement: Recommendations to the Obama Administration and the Congress," *Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement*, June 2010.

[33] *Incentives to Transit: Policy Responses to Influxes of Iraqi Forced Migrants in Jordan*, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, European University Institute, Working Paper, RSC no. 2002/50; *Jordan as a Transit Country: Semi Protectionist Immigration Polices and Their Effects on Iraqi Forced Migrants,* Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, European University Institute, Working Paper, no 61, August 2002; "Iraqi Asylum Migrants in Jordan: Condition, Religious Networks and the Smuggling Process" in George Borjas and Jeff Crisp, eds., *Poverty, International Migration and Asylum* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 341-370.

missing is a detailed analysis of how the US response to the displacement of Iraqis has developed since 2003. The present study seeks to fill this gap.

Structure

In order to trace the development of the US response to the displacement of Iraqis and show how it has changed over the course of the conflict in Iraq, this study begins in 2003 and ends by examining the most recent documents and public statements released by the Obama Administration. It is organized into three chapters, each of which discusses a particular period in the conflict. The first chapter focuses on the first two years of the conflict (2003-2005), when newly displaced Iraqis were significantly outnumbered by returning refugees and IDPs. The second chapter, which covers 2006-2008, discusses the US response during the height of the displacement problem in mid-2006 and traces it through the end of the Bush Administration. The third chapter examines the Obama Administration's response to the problem.

CHAPTER II

2003-2005: THE POSTWAR RETURN OF REFUGEES AND IDPS

As Géraldine Chatelard has shown, displacement has been a part of Iraq's social and political fabric since the establishment of the state in 1920, and the state itself has been responsible for much of this displacement.[1] She argues that historically, "population displacements in Iraq were intrinsically linked to the creation of a nation state seeking to homogenize populations, assert sovereignty over territories contested by other nationalist claims, silence domestic political opposition, and perform population engineering as part of policies of modernization and development."[2] The most recent examples are Saddam Hussein's policies of forced expulsion in northern and southern Iraq, which resulted in the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Kurds and Shi'is. However, as Chatelard acknowledges, other factors have also caused Iraqis to flee their homes, and under Saddam Hussein they included the devastation of two wars, increased authoritarianism, Iraq's pariah status, its impoverishment after years of UN sanctions, the resulting decline in healthcare and education systems, and a desire to seek greater

[1] See "What Visibility Conceals: Re-embedding Refugee Migration from Iraq," in Dawn Chatty, ed., *Dispossession and Displacement: Forced-Migration in the Middle East and Africa*, (London: British Academy, 2009) and "The Politics of Population Movements in Contemporary Iraq: A Research Agenda," in Riccardo Bocco, Jordi Tejel and Peter Sluglett, eds., *Writing the History of Iraq: Historiographical and Political Challenges*, London: World Scientific Publishers/Imperial College Press) (Forthcoming).

[2] "Politics of Population Movements in Contemporary Iraq," 4.

opportunities outside the country.[3] In March 2003, when the US-led coalition invaded Iraq, an estimated 1 million Iraqis were already internally displaced[4] and another 500,000 were refugees.[5]

Despite expectations to the contrary, the war did not immediately result in significant numbers of new displacements. According to UNHCR, it is more common for mass displacements to occur later in a conflict, sometimes even after the fighting has ended. However, it may well have been that Iraqis simply felt safer at home.[6] Ashraf al-Khalidi and Victor Tanner note that another factor keeping Iraqis home was the new hope that they could rebuild their country and establish a more inclusive political system after the fall of Saddam Hussein.[7] Philip Marfleet illustrates this hope by drawing attention to what he refers to as "the creation of new forms of organization," noting that by June 2004, Iraqis had established 13 new television stations, 74 radio stations and 150 independent newspapers and magazines. He also cites the widespread interest in the 2005 parliamentary elections.[8] Moreover, the Sunni insurgency and the sectarian conflict responsible for most of the violence that has come to characterize post-war Iraq had not yet emerged.[9]

In the months directly after the fall of Saddam Hussein, Iraq faced a different kind of displacement problem: determining how to accommodate the refugees and IDPs who

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[3] Chatelard, *Migration from Iraq between the Gulf and the Iraq Wars*, 3; Sassoon, 10-31.

[4] John Fawcett and Victor Tanner, *The Internally Displaced People of Iraq*, The Brookings Institution, October 2002, p. 1; UNHCR, "Fact Sheet: The Iraq Situation," May 16, 2003.

[5] UNHCR, "Statistical Annex I," *Statistical Yearbook 2002*, September 2, 2004.

[6] UNHCR, "UN Humanitarian Briefing on Iraq," April 2, 2003.

[7] Ashraf al-Khalidi and Victor Tanner, *Sectarian Violence: Radical Groups Drive Internal Displacement in Iraq*, The Brookings Institution, October 2006, 7.

[8] Philip Marfleet, "Iraq's Refugees: 'Exit' from the State," *International Journal of Contemporary Iraqi Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (2007), 409.

[9] Khalidi and Tanner, 7.

had decided to return home. Immediately after the war began, Iraqi refugees began expressing a desire to go home. Those who had been living in a Saudi refugee compound near the border with Iraq since 1991 told a reporter from the *New York Times* that the compound felt like a prison and that they longed to see their country again. Some had born children in the compound and wanted them to see Iraq for the first time.[10] This desire was shared by the hundreds of refugees who returned to Iraq from Iran throughout the second half of 2003[11] and even by those living in the much greater comfort of London.[12] By May 2004, more than 6,000 displaced Iraqis had returned from Iran and almost 5,000 from Saudi Arabia.[13] IDPs were also returning, and by March 2004, 60,000 displaced Kurds had returned to Kirkuk.[14] Although UNHCR had made preparations to assist Iraqis fleeing their country, neither it, nor other humanitarian organizations, nor the US was fully prepared to help with repatriation, although they were able to provide some assistance.[15] As a result, by mid-2004, most of the returnees still had not been able to return to their homes, and many returned refugees had become IDPs.[16] To complicate matters further, their return created tension and additional displacements as they struggled to recover their old homes from their new occupants.[17]

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[10] Sarah Kershaw, "A Nation at War: Iraqi Exiles; In Saudi Desert, '91 Refugees Long to Return," *The New York Times*, April 11, 2003, A3.

[11] UNHCR, "Iraq: Spontaneous Returns from Iran, HC's Visit," July 15, 2003; "Iran: Second Group of Iraqi Refugees Return to Iraq," *IRNA News Agency* (Iran), from BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, Dec. 8, 2003.

[12] Dan Newling, "Let Us Go Home! Refugees Told it's not Safe to Go Back to Iraq," *Daily Mail*, May 22, 2003, 31.

[13] UNHCR, "Iraq: Sporadic Returns, but Security Situation Forces Emphasis on Maintenance," May 7, 2004.

[14] David Romano, "Whose House is This Anyway? IDP and Refugee Return in Post-Saddam Iraq," *Journal of Refugee* Studies, Vol. 8, No. 4 (December 2005), 445.

[15] Romano, 436.

[16] Romano, 435; Sassoon, 11.

[17] UNHCR, "Security an Issue for Returnees Too," April 2, 2004, www.unhcr.org.

By late 2004, significant numbers of Iraqis had been newly displaced. In November 2004, the conflict between coalition forces and insurgents in Falluja led to the displacement of almost 200,000 Iraqis. Sectarian tensions were also starting to surface, and Iraqis began fleeing mixed areas for ones where their own sects predominated.[18] One indicator that sectarianism remained latent at the beginning of the war was the fact that only 4.5 percent of Iraqis questioned in a survey stated that religion should be a determining factor in choosing a political party.[19] As conditions deteriorated, it emerged as a cause of violence, and thus a contributor to displacement.

This deterioration was due in part to the Coalition Provisional Authority's (CPA) dismantling of the remaining institutions of the state and its inability to fill their place quickly enough to ensure that Iraqis' basic needs were met. De-B'athification and the disbanding of the Iraqi army rendered around 400,000 people jobless and left ministries without ministers and essential staff. In 2004, the official unemployment rate was 48 percent, but other estimates placed it closer to 70 percent.[20] Families, and in some cases entire communities, were left without livelihoods. Basic services, the judicial system and financial institutions were all essentially non-existent.[21]

As Iraqis became more desperate, kinship and sectarian ties became more important because they were the primary means through which Iraqis could obtain basic necessities. Marfleet notes that most Iraqis were not innately hostile toward different sectarian groups, but as their survival came to depend more on ties with their own groups they became increasingly sectarian. Within this atmosphere, the struggle for limited

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[18] Sassoon, 10-11.
[19] Ibid., 15.
[20] Marfleet, 405.
[21] UNHCR, "Latest Guidance on Iraqi Asylum Seekers," March 16, 2004, www.unhcr.org.

resources resulted in sectarian violence,[22] which then spawned more violence in the form of revenge killings.[23] In March 2004, UNHCR highlighted the fact that Iraqis believed to be working or collaborating with the CPA had also become targets of violence.[24]

By the end of 2005, over 250,000 Iraqis were living as refugees, over 20,000 were seeking asylum and 1.2 million were displaced within Iraq.[25] It is important to note that these figures include Iraqis displaced both before and after the 2003 war. However, when compared with the figures from before the war and with the numbers of returnees, they provide some indication of how many Iraqis became displaced between 2003 and 2005. Before the war, 500,000 Iraqi refugees were registered with UNHCR, and by the end of 2005, just over 300,000 had returned.[26] The figures for 2005 thus suggest that at least 50,000 Iraqis had become refugees since 2003. In 2003, around 1 million were internally displaced, and by the end of 2005, just under 200,000 had returned,[27] so the figures for 2005 indicate that roughly 400,000 Iraqis had been internally displaced since 2003.

During the first few years of post-Saddam Iraq, the direct causes of displacement were increasing sectarian violence, conflicts between the coalition forces and the insurgency and violence against Iraqis perceived to be collaborating with the CPA. Iraq's inability to accommodate returning refugees contributed as well. However, in a more general sense, displacement was the result of what Marfleet refers to as "cumulative causation." He explains this by noting that populations are initially very reluctant to flee, but when individuals begin to leave, a process is often set in motion that disrupts

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[22] Marfleet, 410.
[23] Sassoon, 15.
[24] UNHCR, "Latest Guidance on Iraqi Asylum Seekers."
[25] UNHCR, "2005 UNHCR Statistical Yearbook: Iraq," April 30, 2007, www.unhcr.org, 371.
[26] Ibid., 370.
[27] Ibid., 370.

community structures, compelling more and more people to leave until the integrity of the community is compromised, resulting in mass migration.[28] While mass migration from Iraq had not yet begun by the end of 2005, the process had been set in motion.

The Return of Displaced Iraqis as a Vote of Confidence in their Country's Future

On March 19, 2003, when President Bush announced that the US had begun military operations against Iraq, he stated that the purpose of the war was "to disarm Iraq, free its people and to defend the world from grave danger."[29] However, by the end of 2004, when it was clear that there were no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, the US began placing more emphasis on freeing its people through the establishment of a stable democracy, and the return of displaced Iraqis was understood as being consistent with this goal. In a speech at the end of 2004, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld described the return of thousands of displaced Iraqis as a "vote of confidence in the future of the country."[30]

It also fitted nicely with US policy toward displaced populations. The State Department identifies the assistance of refugees worldwide as an important foreign policy goal and emphasizes that its "assistance is targeted to address immediate protection needs of refugees as well as to ensure that basic needs for water, sanitation, food, health care,

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[28] Marfleet, 408.

[29] George W. Bush, "Address by President Bush, March 19, 2003," in Philip Auerswald, ed., *Iraq, 1990-2006: A Diplomatic History Through Documents*, Vol. III (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 2.

[30] Quoted in Romano, "IDP and Refugee Return to Northern Iraq: Sustainable Returns or Demographic Bombs?" *Refuge*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (2007), 143.

shelter and education are met."[31] Its preferred solution to displacement is voluntary repatriation, and this preference is shared by the international community. In the early stages of the conflict in Iraq, when the numbers of returnees were far higher than those of the newly displaced, the US was in a position not only to make the plausible claim that it had created the necessary conditions for refugees and IDPs to return to Iraq but also to emphasize that their return was an indication that the US had been right to invade Iraq and that it was succeeding in its project to rebuild the country as a stable democracy. In short, the return of displaced Iraqis was politically convenient for the US.

The emphasis on voluntary repatriation is evident in the available documents on displacement from the postwar planning committees and the CPA. These documents create the impression that although the planning committees anticipated the return of displaced Iraqis, the CPA was left to respond to the situation as it unfolded. Three main entities had been responsible for postwar planning: the State Department's Future of Iraq Project and two offices based in the Department of Defense—the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (ORHA) and the Office of Special Plans (OSP). There was little or no coordination among the three groups or even between the two based in the Pentagon. Jay Garner, the head of ORHA, claimed never to have seen any of the plans produced by OSP.[32] The work of these three offices must be understood within the context of the bitter infighting between the State Department, which was very skeptical of the administration's plans for post-war Iraq, and the Department of Defense,

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[31] US Department of State, Bureau of Population, Migration and Refugees, *Proposed Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2005 Report to the Congress*, Jan. 1, 2005, www.state.gov.

[32] Rajiv Chandrasekaran, *Imperial Life in the Emerald City: Inside Iraq's Green Zone* (New York: Vintage Books, 2006), 34.

which the Bush Administration gave its own planning offices to ensure that it had greater control over Iraq's future.

The Future of Iraq Project included a working group to discuss issues relating to returning refugees and IDPs. The group held preliminary discussions resulting in a PowerPoint slide indicating that it must develop plans to address the humanitarian and legal issues surrounding the return of displaced Iraqis and that it must develop plans for determining citizenship and ownership of property, but the group never held a formal meeting.[33] Documents from ORHA and OSP remain classified, but Garner has stated that his team expected the war to result in new displacements and prepared accordingly.[34] It is unclear whether ORHA planned for the return of Iraqis displaced before 2003.

According to Larry Bartlett, the CPA's senior advisor to the Iraqi Ministry of Displacement and Migration, the State Department formed Disaster Assistance Response Teams (DART) almost a year before the war to begin planning for the return of displaced Iraqis. The DART teams recognized the problems that might occur as Kurds returning to Kirkuk and its surrounding areas found their former homes occupied by Arabs brought in through Saddam's Arabization campaign. Bartlett claims that the US thus secured commitments from its Kurdish allies to prevent returning Kurds from displacing Arabs, and that the Kurdish leadership agreed to help returning Kurds seek restitution or compensation in "a uniform legal manner."[35] Bartlett revealed this information in an interview with David Romano, but documentation of the DARTs' planning does not seem to be publicly available. Moreover, the commitment from the Kurdish leadership

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[33] US Department of State, *The Future of Iraq Project: Overview*, www.gwu/nsarchiv.

[34] United States House of Representatives, Hearing Before the Subcommittee on National Security Emerging Threats and International Relations of the Committee on Government Reform, *Humanitarian Assistance Following Military Operations: Overcoming Barriers*, July 18, 2003, 21.

[35] Cited in Romano, "IDP and Refugee Return to Northern Iraq," 137.

did not stop new displacements from occurring, as many Arabs fled out of fear that the returning Kurds would seek revenge, although in some cases they left because they recognized that they were occupying other people's homes.[36]

The CPA acknowledged the necessity of formalizing a process for resolving land disputes, and Paul Bremer, administrator of the CPA, issued two regulations regarding property claims. The first, issued in June 2003, recognized "that large numbers of people from different ethnic and religious backgrounds in Iraq have been uprooted and forced to move from their properties to serve political objectives of the Ba'thist regime" and that "pending the establishment of a means of fully resolving property-related claims by a future Iraqi government, certain of these claims may be amenable to voluntary reconciliation immediately, thereby avoiding further and instability and violence."[37] The regulation established the Iraqi Property Reconciliation Facility (IPRF) and tasked it with collecting property claims and resolving them quickly and judiciously. The second regulation authorized Iraq's Governing Council to establish the Iraq Property Claims Commission (IPCC) to perform the duties previously assigned to the IPRF, and the commission's work has continued under the government of Iraq.[38] This regulation also contained detailed guidelines for resolving property disputes, and it appears to have had some success, as roughly a third of the claims it has received have been resolved.[39]

A further indication of the CPA's acknowledgement of the challenge presented by returning refugees and IDPs was the order Bremer signed in January 2004 establishing

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[36] Ibid., 137.

[37] Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), "Coalition Provisional Authority Regulation Number 4: Establishment of the Iraqi Property Reconciliation Facility," June 26, 2003, www.iraqcoalition.org.

[38] CPA, "Coalition Provisional Authority Regulation Number 8: Delegation of Authority Regarding an Iraq Property Claims Commission," January 14, 2004, www.iraqcoalition.org.

[39] Deborah Isser and Peter Van der Auweraert, "Land, Property, and the Challenge of Return for Iraq's Displaced," United States Institute of Peace, Special Report 221, Apr. 2009, 8.

the Ministry of Displacement and Migration (MODM), which recognized "that the return, relocation and reintegration of refugees and internally placed persons (IDPs) is vital to Iraq's social and political stability."[40] A CPA fact sheet published in May that year indicates that the MODM's objectives were to "assist limited voluntary refugee returns to Iraq" and "create durable solutions for IDPs." The ministry's accomplishments are listed as facilitating the return of over 11,000 refugees, and the challenges identified relate to Iraq's inability to accommodate significant numbers of further returnees.[41]

Other examples of the emphasis on repatriation appear in reports issued by the State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration. In its reports to Congress on proposed refugee admissions for fiscal years 2004 and 2005, the bureau noted that the Iraq War had "dramatically expanded the possibilities for refugee repatriation."[42] The same reports expressed a hope that Iraqis displaced throughout the world would soon return to Iraq. However, there are subtle, but important, differences in the language used in each report. The report for 2003 states, "it is *expected* that the majority of the 400,000 Iraqi refugees located throughout the Middle East and Europe will be able to return home in the near or mid term" (emphasis added). The report for 2004 uses "hoped" rather than "expected" and, unlike the previous report, also mentions that "the security situation will remain an important consideration in repatriation," thus acknowledging that the situation in Iraq had deteriorated since the previous report. However, it contains no mention of new displacements. Richard Green, the bureau's

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[40]CPA, "Coalition Provisional Authority Order Number 50: The Ministry of Displacement and Migration," January 10, 2004, www.iraqcoalition.org.

[41] CPA, "Fact Sheet on the Ministry of Displacement and Migration," May 8, 2004, www.iraqcoalition.org.

[42] Ibid.; *Proposed Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2004 Report to the Congress*, Jan 1, 2004, www.state.gov.

Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State did, however, mention this possibility in a statement before Congress, noting that part of the bureau's responsibility was to "prevent further population displacements."[43] Green also added that "the conditions do not yet exist for large-scale organized refugee returns,"[44] a further acknowledgement of the significant challenges the returning refugees and IDPs presented for the US and Iraq.

What emerges from a review of these documents and public statements is that despite official policy statements about providing humanitarian assistance, the US clearly viewed displacement mostly in political terms, and although it welcomed the return of refugees and IDPs, it wanted to ensure that they returned in a way that did not further destabilize Iraq. Green's comments notwithstanding, a notable absence from the documents and public statements from this period is any mention of new displacements, presumably because significant numbers of Iraqis did not become newly displaced until late 2004 and even then, the numbers were still less than the numbers of Iraqis who had returned. New displacements had not yet become a cause of concern. However, it is also undeniable that while the US gained politically from the fact that Iraqis were returning, new displacements could be interpreted as a sign that the US was losing control and that Iraqis lacked faith in its vision of a new Iraq. Drawing attention to new displacements was not in its interest.

[43] United States House of Representatives, Hearing Before the Subcommittee on National Security Emerging Threats and International Relations, 67.

[44] Ibid., 68.

CHAPTER III

2006-2008: MASS DISPLACEMENT AND THE "SURGE"

By mid-2006, the pattern of displacement had reversed: displaced Iraqis were no longer returning in significant numbers, and as many as 2,000 Iraqis were fleeing their country each day.[1] Many of them were escaping the sectarian violence triggered by the bombing of the al-'Askariyya mosque in February 2006. Immediately after the bombing, Shi'i militiamen led by Muqtada al-Sadr began killing Sunnis and attacking their mosques throughout Baghdad. Sunnis responded in kind, resulting in a cycle of violence that strengthened radical groups as their co-sectarians began seeking their protection.[2] Although most of the violence was carried out by extremists, it escalated to the point where members of both sects were forced to take sides.[3] If before this incident sectarian violence had been a by-product of the struggle for survival, rather than the result of open hostility between Sunnis and Shi'is, the nature of the sectarian violence had changed, and its victims were now targeted simply for belonging to a particular sect.[4]

Based on their extensive fieldwork in Iraq during the summer of 2006, Ashraf al-Khalidi and Victor Tanner have provided a detailed description of the various forms that the sectarian violence had taken. They emphasize that extremist groups were responsible

[1] Ferris, 9-10.
[2] Khalidi and Tanner, 7.
[3] Ibid., 10.
[4] Ibid., 4.

for most of the violence and that they used it to consolidate their power and increase the areas under their control. For example, they note that after the bombing of the Shi'i shrine in Samarra, Sadr sought to increase his popularity by organizing retaliatory violence against Sunnis. Both sides attempted to sow violence in mixed communities where intersectarian relations had remained good, and in the absence of a government able to provide protection and basic services, the radical groups successfully presented themselves as the protectors and providers.[5] Because these radical groups sought to consolidate the territory under their control, Khalidi and Tanner refer to their campaigns of violence as "ethnic cleansing," noting that the "result is that hard-line authorities . . . hold sway over cleansed territories."[6]

Largely as a result of this sectarian violence, by September 2007, over 4 million Iraqis were displaced, 2.2 million internally and just under 2 million outside Iraq.[7] However, other factors contributed as well. The local police were part of the problem, as they were either directly involved in the sectarian violence themselves or powerless to stop it.[8] Fear of violence also played a big role, and it often stemmed from rumors, general intimidation in the form of threatening graffiti or direct intimidation appearing in letters addressed to individuals or even entire families and in notes or fliers attached to the doors of their homes or businesses.[9] As a further cause of displacement, Khalidi and Tanner highlight what they refer to as "administrative displacement": the manipulation of jobs and benefits by the Shi'i government as a method of encouraging Sunnis to leave

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[5] Ibid., 11-13.
[6] Ibid., 28.
[7] UNHCR, "Statistics on Displaced Iraqis Around the World," Sept. 2007.
[8] Khalidi and Tanner, 13.
[9] Ibid., 27-8.

and the harassment of Sunnis by the mostly Shi‘i police.[10] Moreover, the lack of security and basic services, decline in standards of living, unemployment, unresolved property disputes and ongoing conflict between the US-led coalition and insurgent groups, all of which had contributed to the pre-2006 displacement of Iraqis, continued throughout 2006 and 2007.[11] The cumulative causation of all these factors resulted in mass displacement.[12]

It affected all sectors of the population. Some of the first Iraqis to flee were former Ba‘thists, as even those with only remote connections to the party were victims of violence. Professionals, particularly doctors, lawyers and academics, also began to flee as they became the targets of kidnappings because of their relative wealth.[13] As the sectarian violence escalated, the victims of violence multiplied. Khalidi and Tanner identify four categories of Iraqis who were displaced by sectarian violence: Sunnis from Shi‘i areas, Shi‘is from Sunni areas, Arabs from Kurdish areas, and minority groups from Sunni and Shi‘i areas.[14] Ferris notes that because more men have died from the violence, more women are among the displaced, with women and children accounting for up to 80 percent of displaced Iraqis.[15] Emphasizing that displacement is a national problem, she indicates that all eighteen of Iraq’s governorates have registered IDPs.[16]

Toward the end of 2007, when the US sent more troops to Iraq as part of its military “surge,” former Sunni insurgents began cooperating with the US, and Muqtada al-Sadr ordered his Mahdi Army to stop engaging the coalition forces, violence

[10] Ibid., 28.
[11] Ibid., 4; Ferris, 3-4.
[12] See Marfleet, 408.
[13] Sassoon, 140.
[14] Khalidi and Tanner, 21-3.
[15] Ferris, 6.
[16] Ferris, 4.

decreased, the rate of displacement slowed, and small numbers of refugees even began returning to Iraq. However, the numbers of returnees were low, as just over 75,000, or less than 1 percent of displaced Iraqis, had returned by March 2008, and the total numbers of the displaced kept growing, with around 3 million Iraqis internally displaced at the end of 2008 and up to 2.4 million living as refugees.[17]

The displacement of Iraqis is mostly an urban phenomenon, as both IDPs and refugees tend to live in city apartments rather than in the tent compounds commonly associated with refugee populations. Many of the Iraqis who first fled their country were wealthy Ba'thists, creating the impression among citizens of host countries that most displaced Iraqis were wealthy.[18] However, as the sectarian violence escalated throughout 2006, and more Iraqis began fleeing for their lives, the population of displaced Iraqis became more demographically mixed, and the scale of the displacement began raising serious humanitarian concerns.

In addition to the obvious trauma, sense of loss, despair and uncertainty that accompany displacement, many of Iraq's refugees and IDPs struggle to meet their basic needs. Most of the refugees are in Syria and Jordan, where they are not allowed to work, requiring them to live on savings or money sent from their families.[19] As unemployment is one driver of displacement, the employment situation is no better for IDPs. There have been some instances of refugee women turning to prostitution to support their families.[20] Both groups of displaced lack easy access to healthcare, some are experiencing

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[17] Michael O'Hanlon and Jason H. Campbell, *Iraq Index: Tracking Variables of Reconstruction & Security in Post-Saddam Iraq*, The Brookings Institution, August 20, 2010, http://www.brookings.edu/iraqindex, 26.

[18] Sassoon, 36-7.

[19] ICG, 4-5.

[20] Sassoon, 18.

malnutrition, and their children's education has been disrupted.[21] Although Syria and Jordan allow Iraqi children to attend their schools, attendance among refugees is low because, among other reasons, they lack the necessary paperwork, cannot afford uniforms and supplies, and they are unprepared for the different curriculums they encounter.[22]

In addition to the humanitarian problems it creates, displacement also destabilizes Iraq and its neighbors and raises security concerns. IDPs and refugees create new strains on public services, evidenced by water shortages and overcrowded schools in Syria and Jordan,[23] which have resulted in resentment among the local populations. They are also blamed for increases in rent and the prices of staple goods.[24] Iraq suffers a brain drain resulting from the flight of significant numbers of its professional class, complicating the tasks of rebuilding and growing the economy. By the summer of 2007, up to 40 percent of the professional class had left, including 50 percent of Iraq's doctors, but also significant numbers of academics, teachers, and engineers, thus weakening Iraq's healthcare and education systems and hindering its ability to rebuild, grow the economy and create democratic institutions.[25]

Displacement is also altering Iraq's sectarian geography, making its neighborhoods increasingly homogenized and raising troubling questions about Iraqis' ability to form a national identity that supersedes more local identities. This

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[21] ICG, 5.

[22] Sassoon, 41, 70.

[23] Ibid., 40-2, 56.

[24] ICG, 12. Sassoon has demonstrated that in Jordan prices have increased for a variety of reasons and that the influx of Iraqi refugees is just one of several contributing factors. In fact, he notes that the overall economic impact of Iraqis in Jordan has been positive, as they have injected more capital into its economy (51). However, for the Jordanians who are now paying more in living expenses, Iraqi refugees are an easy scapegoat.

[25] Ferris, *Security, Displacement and Iraq: A Deadly Combination*, The Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement, Aug. 27, 2007, 9.

homogenization is facilitated by militant groups in two general ways. Shi'i militants, for example, will not only force Sunni families from the areas under their control but will also help fellow Shi'is who have been displaced from Sunni areas move into the homes vacated by Sunni families.[26] These same militant groups will also provide the humanitarian assistant the government has failed to deliver. Internal displacement thus creates opportunities for radical groups to increase their influence and solidifies sectarian identities, making it more difficult for Iraq to form a strong central government that has the trust and support of a majority of its people.[27]

Iraqi refugees tend to live in sectarian communities, and although to date they have not exported their country's sectarian violence, sectarian identities are reinforced by the displacement, leading host countries to fear that increased sectarianism will result in sectarian violence at some point.[28] Jordan and Syria are also concerned that the influx of Iraqi refugees will contribute to Islamic militancy. In Jordan, Iraqis have moved into the poor neighborhood of Zarqa, known for its Islamist community's opposition to the Jordanian monarchy and also as the hometown of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who led al-Qa'ida in Iraq until his death in 2006. According to Ferris, the Islamists of Zarqa have become more openly anti-American and anti-Shi'i since 2003, and Jordan fears that the Sunni refugees from Iraq will find their message appealing.[29] Syria has similar concerns, fearing that as Iraqis move in, the resulting resentment among the local population will increase support for political Islam and contribute to unrest.[30] In addition, Syria, and Jordan even more so, fear that like the Palestinian refugees who have lived within their

[26] Ibid., 7.
[27] Ibid., 6-8.
[28] ICG, 5-7.
[29] Ferris, *Security, Displacement and Iraq*, 13.
[30] Ibid., 17.

borders for several decades, the displaced Iraqis will remain indefinitely. Jordan has the highest ratio of refugees to local population of any country in the world, and its response to the influx of Iraqi refugees is inevitably colored by the fact that hosting large numbers of Palestinian refugees has created challenges to its national identity and at times resulted in serious threats to its security. In an interview with Sassoon, a Jordanian official summarized his country's concerns by stating that it is in danger of becoming "the Hashemite Kingdom of Refugees."[31] Jordan and Syria have both begun making it more difficult for Iraqis to enter and creating incentives for them to leave by, for example, introducing visa requirements that are difficult, if not impossible, for most Iraqis to meet.[32]

By the end of 2008, the displacement of Iraqis had thus become not only a humanitarian crisis for the displaced themselves, but also a national problem for Iraq and a regional concern for its neighbors. It had also created major obstacles for the US in achieving its goals in Iraq. If, as Rumsfeld had claimed at the end of 2004, the return of displaced Iraqis was a vote of confidence in the future of their country, the displacement situation at the end of 2008 represented a clear vote of no confidence. As Ferris notes, "The presence of two million refugees in neighboring countries is a clear indication that US policies are failing."[33]

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[31] Quoted in Sassoon, 52.
[32] ICG, 9-10, 17-20.
[33] Ferris, *Security, Displacement and Iraq*, 9.

Gradual American Recognition of the Problem

As President Bush stated several times throughout the first few months of 2006, America's goals in Iraq were to protect its fledgling democracy, increase its security and help with reconstruction.[34] The displacement of Iraqis complicated all three of these goals, but if this fact was recognized by the Bush Administration, it was not acknowledged in any of its public statements throughout 2006. As evidence that the US was succeeding in Iraq, the Bush Administration cited the constitutional referendum and two elections that had been held since 2003, the training of security forces, the growing size and strength of these forces, improvements in the performance of the Iraqi police, the tough political choices Iraqis had made in reforming their economy, and the fact that the economy was growing.[35] The bombing of the al-'Askariyya shrine was often cited as a failed attempt to incite sectarian violence, and Iraqis were praised for passing an important test by not turning to violence and allowing their country to descend into a civil war. Recognized obstacles the US faced were the tense situation that resulted in the bombing and the continuing actions of "terrorists and Saddamists" who rejected freedom and democracy.[36]

It is understandable that the administration would choose to devote its public statements on Iraq to highlighting the progress it was making, especially after having to

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[34] See "U.S. Strategy in Iraq," Kentucky International Convention Center, Jan. 11, 2006; "Iraq and the War on Terror, Kansas State University, Jan. 23, 2006; "2006 State of the Union Address," Jan. 31, 2006; "Our Work in Iraq," Remarks to Veterans of Foreign Wars, Omni Shoreham Hotel, Washington DC, Jan. 10, 2007.

[35] The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, "Progress and the Work Ahead in Iraq," Jan. 10, 2006.

[36] See White House, Office of the Press Secretary, "Fact Sheet: Operation Iraqi Freedom: Three Years Later," Mar. 18, 2006; White House, Office of the Press Secretary, "Struggle for Victory: Freedom and Iraq," Mar. 29, 2006; Bush, "Democracy in Iraq," Remarks to Freedom House, Hyatt Regency Capital Hill, Mar. 29, 2006.

acknowledge the intelligence failures regarding Saddam's supposed possession of weapons of mass destruction. Moreover, the displacement situation was still unfolding, and in the first few months after the Samarra bombing, it was not yet clear just how bad the situation would become. However, the severity of the sectarian violence and the resulting displacement were becoming apparent by the middle of the year, and the administration should certainly have recognized that the situation in Iraq had taken a turn for the worse by October, when it was preparing its report to Congress on proposed refugee admissions for fiscal year 2007, but this proposal says nothing about new displacements.[37]

More than simply a proposal for refugee admissions, the report on refugees that the President submits to Congress each year provides a discussion of refugee policy, an update on the status of refugees throughout the world and details about how the US has assisted these refugees. While each proposal emphasizes that the preferred solution for displacement is voluntary repatriation, it also acknowledges that in many instances, third-country resettlement is the best option. The proposal for 2007, states that resettlement "is an important part of the President's Freedom Agenda,"[38] President Bush's stated commitment of promoting peace by ending tyranny and spreading freedom and democracy. Despite the fact that Iraq was a key element in this agenda, its displaced people are not listed as a population of concern in the 2007 proposal.

Instead, as in all the previous proposals submitted since the beginning of the Iraq War, the one for 2007 states that the conditions in Iraq "have expanded the possibilities

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[37] See United States Department of State, United States Department of Homeland Security and United States Department of Health and Human Services, *Proposed Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2007: Report to Congress*, Submitted on Behalf of the President of the United States, Oct. 17, 2006.

[38] Ibid., iii.

for refugee repatriation." Moreover, it adds that "with a constitutionally-elected government in place and a commitment by Iraq's leaders to work toward improved security and enhance the delivery of essential services, it is hoped that significant numbers of Iraqi refugees will ultimately be able to return to Iraq." In general terms, the proposal does acknowledge that "some Iraqis in various locations" have been identified by UNHCR for resettlement, but the overall emphasis remains on voluntary repatriation.[39] Given that by mid-summer 2006, several months before the 2007 proposal was submitted to Congress, it was clear that Iraq was potentially facing a new displacement crisis, this proposal was at best based on old information and at worst its authors willfully ignored the displacement problem. It thus seems to support Sassoon's claim that throughout 2006, the US policy toward the displacement of Iraqis was "simplistic: pretend it is not there and hopefully the problem will go away."[40]

However, the growing displacement problem was not completely ignored by American officials throughout 2006. In March, Congress had created the bipartisan Iraq Study Group to review the situation in Iraq and make recommendations for moving forward. Co-chaired by former Sectary of State James Baker and former Congressman Lee Hamilton, the group consisted of former diplomats, academics, public policy specialists and a former Supreme Court justice. Although his name does not appear on the final report, the group had also included Robert Gates before he resigned to serve as President Bush's Secretary of Defense. The group's report, released in December 2006, recommended that the US place more emphasis on diplomacy in Iraq and the region and begin making preparations to reduce its military presence in Iraq. Unlike the public

[39] Ibid., 38-9.
[40] Sassoon, 110.

statements and policy documents released by the Bush Administration during 2006, the Iraq Study Group report acknowledged that displacement was a growing problem, stated that the US has a moral obligation to assist displaced Iraqis, and indicated that displacement was complicating the goal of stabilizing the country.[41]

In the same month, Senator Edward Kennedy published an op-ed in the *Washington Post* arguing that in 2007 the US must pay greater attention to the displacement problem. To make his case, Kennedy listed statistics on the numbers of Iraqi refugees and IDPs, drew attention to the humanitarian concerns surrounding displaced Iraqis, and noted that displacement risked destabilizing the region. He also criticized the Bush Administration for its failure to "recognize the breadth of the crisis and to adjust [its] policy to address the plain facts on the ground" and argued that because the US "bears heavy responsibility" for the flight of displaced Iraqis, it must not only acknowledge the displacement problem but also devote more resources to assisting the displaced.[42]

The Bush Administration began acknowledging the problem in early 2007. In an address to the nation, President Bush backed away from his earlier assertion that the insurgents who bombed the Shi'i shrine in Samarra had failed to incite sectarian violence and admitted that "their strategy worked."[43] As the purpose of this address was to announce that he was sending 20,000 more troops to Iraq, he also stated that the US must adopt a new strategy for responding to the sectarian violence. In another notable departure from Bush's earlier statements, the address said very little about freedom and

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[41] James Baker III and Lee H. Hamilton, *Iraq Study Group Report*, Authorized Edition (New York: Vintage Books, 2006), 2, 87-8.

[42] Edward M. Kennedy, "We Can't Ignore Iraq's Refugees," *The Washington Post*, Dec. 30, 2006: A21.

[43] George W. Bush, "Address of the President to the Nation," Jan. 10, 2007.

democracy and instead emphasized the goal of securing Iraq. It did, however, remind Americans of the War in Iraq's central role in "the global war on terror," of al-Qa'ida's goals of "taking down Iraq's democracy," and of the ideological struggle between peace and moderation on one side and violent extremism on the other.

The following week, Ellen Sauerbrey, the Assistant Secretary for Population, Refugees, and Migration, attended a Senate hearing on Iraqi refugees, during which senators of both parties emphasized America's moral obligation to assist displaced Iraqis, particularly ones who had worked with the US, and the problem of Iraq's brain drain resulting from the fact that so many professionals had fled.[44] In the Bush Administration's first public acknowledgement of Iraq's displacement problem, Secretary Sauerbrey assured them that "the administration shares your concern" and admitted that the "trend of repatriation had reversed itself." In order to assure senators that the administration was not ignoring the problem, she noted that in 2006, it had provided UNHCR with close to $8 million for assisting Iraqi refugees in Syria, Jordan and Lebanon and that it had also given money to NGOs working with displaced Iraqis. She also indicated that the US was providing funding for UNHCR and various NGOs to help internally displaced Iraqis, and that the administration was working to resettle more Iraqis in the US, particularly those who had been targeted for working with the US. However, unlike the senators, she did not concede that the US was morally obligated to help displaced Iraqis or that the displacement problem made it more difficult for the US to achieve its goals in Iraq.

[44] Ellen Sauerbrey, "Remarks to Senate Judiciary Committee Hearing on Iraqi Refugees," Jan. 16, 2007.

Nevertheless, Bush's admission that the US strategy in Iraq was not working and Sauerbrey's direct acknowledgement of the displacement problem were in stark contrast to the administration's previous statements regarding the situation in Iraq. These reversals are perhaps best understood as part of the administration's effort to generate support for the military "surge." In order to justify the new approach, the administration first had to acknowledge the failures of the previous approach and then explain why the new approach would succeed where the other had failed. Moreover, throughout 2006, the displacement problem had received considerable media attention, making it more difficult for the administration to ignore, and this was combined with pressure from Congress to recognize the problem and develop an adequate response to it. A bit of candor from the administration regarding the war's adverse effects on Iraqis was thus necessary for it to gain support for its new strategy. Dodd notes that with the displacement problem, the administration was "caught in a bind: wanting to appear generous while not drawing too much attention to the issue."[45] In other words, as Sauerbrey's remarks to the Senate demonstrate, the administration wanted to show that it was responding to the problem, without necessarily acknowledging its severity or directly stating that it was creating serious obstacles for the US as it struggled to achieve its goals in Iraq.

In April 2007, the administration released its quarterly report on the situation in Iraq, which reiterated America's commitment to "helping the Iraqi people build a constitutional, representative government" and stated that the "ultimate goal is an Iraq that is peaceful, united, stable, democratic, and secure, with institutions capable of

[45] Dodd, 5.

providing just governance and security for all Iraqis."[46] Without mentioning displacement's impact on this goal, the report did acknowledge the problem and again noted that the US was assisting displaced Iraqis by funding UNHCR and various NGOs. After visiting Syria and Jordan in March and becoming alarmed by the number of displaced Iraqi children who were not attending school, Sauerbrey indirectly linked the displacement problem with America's progress in Iraq by noting that the disruption in the children's education was "a looming disaster for Iraq."[47] She announced that in order to help these children continue their education, the US was contributing $30 million to UNHCR and UNICEF's Joint Appeal to Provide Educational Opportunities for Iraqi Children in Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and Egypt.[48] However, by acknowledging the problem and announcing the funding, she did not echo the Senators' assertions that the US had a moral obligation to help displaced Iraqis, and instead cast the displacement problem as an international problem, calling for "resources from a broad range of donors."[49]

While the administration was publicizing its efforts to fund UNHCR and other organizations, it was coming under increasing criticism for not allowing more Iraqi refugees to resettle in the US. In his op-ed, Senator Kennedy had lamented the fact that the US had accepted only 202 Iraqi refugees in 2006.[50] This was due, in part, to what Berman has called the "securitization" of asylum seekers: viewing displaced Iraqis as

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[46] *Section 1227 Report on Iraq*, Apr. 6, 2007.

[47] Sauerbrey, "Sectarian Violence and the Refugee Crisis in Iraq," Remarks to the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom Hearing, Sept. 19, 2007.

[48] Sauerbrey, "U.S. Helps Iraqi Refugee Children Return to School," Remarks Upon the Announcement of $30 million Contribution to UNHCR/UNICEF Joint Appeal, Amman, Jordan, Aug. 28, 2007.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Kennedy, A21.

potential sources of violence rather than as victims of it.[51] However, the low acceptance numbers were also a result of the new security rules implemented since September 2011 that required more intensive scrutiny of asylum seekers. Under these rules, several months could pass between the time a refugee was recommended for resettlement and the time his or her file was finally processed. US Ambassador to Iraq Ryan Crocker criticized this process for taking too long and urged the administration to find ways of expediting it.[52] One provision of these rules is that an individual who has provided material support to terrorists cannot be recognized as a refugee. However, material support was defined so broadly that this provision disqualified Iraqis who had paid ransoms to save their family members who had been kidnapped. In an op-ed criticizing this broad interpretation, Kirk Johnson, the USAID coordinator of reconstruction in Falluja, provided the example of a woman who had worked for the CPA and had thus become a target of violence but was ineligible for asylum in the US because she and her husband had paid terrorists a ransom to secure the release of their kidnapped son.[53] Another problem that Crocker highlighted was that Iraqis had to leave the country in order to register for resettlement, even those who had worked for the US, and as Jordan and Syria made it more difficult for Iraqis to enter, it was impossible for many to register for asylum.[54]

In response to these various criticisms, the Bush Administration began taking steps to allow more Iraqis to resettle in the US. It announced plans to resettle 12,000 in

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[51] Berman, 14.

[52] Spencer S. Hsu and Robin Wright, "Crocker Blasts Refugee Process; Iraqis Could Wait 2 Years for Entry, Ambassador Says," *The Washington Post*, Sept. 17, 2007, A01.

[53] Kirk W. Johnson, "Hounded by Insurgents, Abandoned by Us," *The New York Times*, Apr. 18, 2007, A23.

[54] Hsu and Wright, A01.

2007 and introduced special immigrant visas (SIVs) to make it easier for Iraqis who had worked with the US to resettle.[55] By November 2007, 2,300 Iraqis had been admitted with SIVs. The US had also expanded the US Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) to process more asylum applications in Jordan, Egypt Lebanon, Syria, Turkey and Lebanon, and although only around 1,600 had been resettled in the US, with the expansion of USRAP and the accelerated pace of asylum issues, the US expected to meet its goal of resettling 12,000 Iraqi refugees during the next year.[56]

More evidence of America's increased efforts to assist displaced Iraqis appears in the Bush Administration's report on proposed refugee admissions for fiscal year 2008. Unlike the report from the previous year, this report directly acknowledges that sectarian violence had "led to wide-scale displacement within and from Iraq." While it emphasizes that "the primary goal continues to be to support efforts to create conditions that will allow Iraqis to return home," it also acknowledges that "the current situation is limiting repatriation."[57]

In 2007, the Bush Administration was much more responsive to Iraq's displacement problem than it had been since the beginning of the conflict in Iraq. Not only did it acknowledge that insurgents had succeeded in provoking sectarian violence and that this violence had resulted in a reversal of the repatriations that had characterized the displacement situation in the first few years of the conflict, but it had also taken significant measures to provide assistance for displaced Iraqis and begin resettling more Iraqis in the US. However, with the small exception of Secretary Sauerbrey's statement

[55] Sauerbrey, "Policy Podcast: Iraqi Refugees Update," Oct. 10, 2007.

[56] US Department of State, "Fact Sheet: United States Humanitarian Assistance for Displaced Iraqis," Nov. 9, 2007.

[57] US Department of State, US Department of Homeland Security, US Department of Health and Human Services, *Proposed Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2008*, 44.

that the disruption in the education of Iraqi children created problems for Iraq's future, the administration had not publicly recognized that the displacement of Iraqis created complications for achieving its goals in Iraq. This did not change in 2008.

In 2008, the first quarterly report on the situation in Iraq again emphasized America's commitment to protecting and strengthening Iraq's democracy. The report also noted that security in Iraqi had improved significantly since the beginning of the "surge." Its assessment of the displacement problem indicated that Iraqis were returning from Syria, but acknowledged that most were returning because their visas had expired or they could no longer afford to live in Syria, not because of security improvements in Iraq.[58] It thus indirectly stated that Iraqis were still not confident in their country's future.

Throughout 2008, the US increased its efforts in assisting displaced Iraqis. In January, President Bush signed the Refugee Crisis in Iraq Act, which contains several provisions for facilitating the process through which Iraqis can apply for resettlement, including the creation of in-country processing facilities and new categories of Iraqis who are eligible for direct access to USRAP.[59] In-country processing had begun by March, and this, combined with the expansion of USRAP, enabled the US to surpass its goal of admitting 12,000 Iraqi refugees by September.[60]

Moreover, statements from administration officials contained more references to America's obligation toward displaced Iraqis, particularly ones who had worked for or assisted the US. For example, during a Congressional hearing on the US response to the

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[58] *Section 1227 Report on Iraq*, Jan. 6, 2008, www.state.gov.

[59] Congressional Research Service (CRS), Summary of *Refugee Crisis in Iraq Act*, Jun. 19, 2007.

[60] US Department of State, "Fact Sheet: U.S. Surpasses Goal of Admitting 12,000 Iraqi Refugees in Fiscal Year 2008; Assistance Reaches New Heights," Sept. 12, 2008.

displacement of Iraqis, Lawrence Butler, the Deputy Assistant Secretary for the State Department's Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, remarked, "We have an obligation to the vulnerable populations that need to leave, that want to leave."[61] James Foley, the State Department's Senior Coordinator for Iraqi Refugee Issues, echoed his statement by noting that "we have special obligations to Iraqis who have been employed by the U.S. or have been closely associated with U.S. efforts in Iraq, who are targeted and under threat for their work on our behalf."[62] However, Foley was also careful to contextualize this obligation as "only part of our wider obligations to create the conditions inside Iraq that will permit some 2 million Iraqi refugees to return home."[63] Fulfilling these obligations was also understood as essential for helping to improve America's image in the Middle East.[64]

Despite the administration's emphasis on the importance of creating the necessary conditions for Iraqis to return home, it also acknowledged that improved security conditions had not yet resulted in a significant pattern of return,[65] that the earlier reported returns from Syria had stopped, and that by the middle of 2008, the Iraqis leaving for Syria outnumbered those who had returned.[66] The administration even acknowledged that the displacement of Iraqis had resulted in "the largest movement of people in the

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[61] *Neglected Responsibilities: The U.S. Response to the Iraqi Refugee Crisis*, Joint Hearing before the Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia and the Subcommittee on International Organizations, Human Rights, and Oversight of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives, Mar. 11, 2008, 52.

[62] James B. Foley, "Latest Developments in the Iraqi Refugee Admissions Program," On-the-Record-Briefing, Washington, DC, Jun. 3, 2008.

[63] *Neglected Responsibilities*, 12.

[64] Ibid., 45-6.

[65] Foley, "Latest Developments."

[66] *Section 1227 Report on Iraq*, May 28, 2008, www.state.gov.

Middle East since 1948," when the creation of Israel led to the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians.[67]

By the end of President Bush's second term, his administration had thus become much more candid about the scale of Iraq's displacement problem and had taken significant steps toward assisting displaced Iraqis. It had also publicly recognized that the US had an obligation to assist these Iraqis, particularly the ones whose lives were endangered because they had worked with the US. Various documents and public statements from the administration indicate that it understood the displacement problem primarily as a humanitarian concern. However, there seems to be no public acknowledgement that the displacement of Iraqis created obstacles for its stated goals of securing and rebuilding Iraq and protecting its young democracy. The administration must have recognized that with IDPs and refugees contributing to instability within Iraq and throughout the region, with the absence of significant numbers of the professional class necessary for rebuilding Iraq, and with the failure of significant numbers of Iraqis to return and thus demonstrate their confidence in their country's future, it would be very difficult to achieve its goals in Iraq, but there is no direct evidence that this was the case.

Assuming that the administration did understand that the displacement of millions of Iraqis complicated its goals in Iraq, it must also have understood that public acknowledgement of this fact could have been politically damaging, as it would have required admitting that despite the security gains, it was not succeeding in Iraq and that achieving success was much more complicated than it had realized. Speaking of displacement in humanitarian terms was a way of demonstrating that the US was meeting

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[67] US Department of State, *Migration and Refugee Assistance: Emergency Refugee and Migration Assistance*, Fiscal Year 2009, 30.

its obligation toward displaced Iraqis, but in the administration's narrative about its success in Iraq, there was no place for an acknowledgement of the wider implications of the displacement problem.

CHAPTER IV

2009-PRESENT: IRAQIS ARE NOT RETURNING

By the time of President Obama's inauguration in January 2009, the rate of displacement had significantly decreased. Whereas people had been fleeing their homes at a rate of 90,000 per month in January 2007, by May 2008, the number had dropped to under 10,000. However, the decreased rate of new displacements was not matched by a marked increase in the number of returns. One indication of this is that of the 20,000 doctors who had fled Iraq since 2003, only 1,000 had returned.[1] As a result, the total number of displaced Iraqis had not decreased,[2] a clear indication that many Iraqis were still very apprehensive about their country's future.

The situation in Iraq had undeniably improved since the beginning of the mass displacement in 2006. The sectarian violence triggered by the bombing of the al-'Askariyya mosque had mostly abated, and the country was experiencing notable security gains. Civilian casualties were under 500 a month, a marked improvement from mid-2006, when the rate was almost 4,000 a month.[3] The number of American troop fatalities in January 2009 was 15, whereas the average had been around 100 a month from 2004 to

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[1] Michael E. O'Hanlon and Jason H. Campbell, *Iraq Index: Tracking Variables of Reconstruction and Security in Post-Saddam Iraq*, The Brookings Institution, Jan. 30, 2009, http://www.brookings.edu/iraqindex, 46.

[2] Ibid., 10, 30.

[3] Ibid., 4.

2007.[4] Moreover, there was also good reason to assume that the quality of life for Iraqis had improved as well. Unemployment had decreased slightly, the country had exceeded its goals for power generation, Internet and phone subscriptions were increasing each month, Iraq's economy was growing and foreign investment had increased tenfold since 2007.[5] Iraq had also made significant steps toward establishing the rule of law, as it had well over 1,000 trained judges by the beginning of 2009, up from zero in 2003.[6]

However, despite these very positive signs that Iraq was becoming safer, more stable and prosperous and thus slightly more bearable to live in, there were still several indicators that it had a long way to go before becoming "the peaceful, united, stable, democratic and secure Iraq" envisioned by the US.[7] Levels of violence were still high; jobs were still hard to find; and the government had still not resolved some of the major political issues preventing Iraq from moving forward, such as reaching an agreement on oil sharing, passing an election law, reversing de-Ba'thification, disbanding militias and amending the constitution to address Sunni concerns.[8]

As a result, Iraqis were not yet convinced that the situation was improving. Thirty-six percent of those polled in February 2008 believed the security situation had improved within the last six months while 37 percent believed it had stayed the same. Twenty-six percent said it had worsened. Similarly, while 36 percent replied that the situation in Iraq was "quite good," the same number indicated that it was "quite bad," and the number who believed it was "very bad" (20 percent) was far greater than the number who said it was "very good" (7 percent). When broken down by sect, the responses indicate that

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[4] Ibid., 14.
[5] Ibid., 37-45.
[6] Ibid., 45.
[7] *Section 1227 Report on Iraq*, Oct. 2008, www.state.gov.
[8] O'Hanlon and Campbell, 12-3.

Sunnis were far less satisfied with the current state of their country than Shi'is and Kurds. Fifty-two percent of Shi'is and 33 percent of Kurds said the situation was "quite good," but only 14 percent of Sunnis felt this way, whereas 43 percent believed the situation was "very bad." However, their opinion had improved since the previous poll in October 2007, when 60 percent of Sunnis said the situation was "very bad."[9] Improvements were thus experienced unevenly among the population, raising ominous questions about the relations among Iraq's different sects and whether it was on the right track toward creating a democracy capable of accommodating these different sects.

As a result, most displaced Iraqis were not yet convinced that it was better for them to return. Although continuing violence is by far the most significant obstacle preventing displaced Iraqis from returning, in assessing the displacement situation, it is important to remember that decisions on whether to return are based on several factors.[10] Uncertainty regarding housing and employment had also discouraged Iraqis from returning, and only 14 percent of those who had returned cited increased security as their reason. Far more indicated that they were running out of money or that their visas had expired.[11] Other factors include access to healthcare, basic services and quality education, all of which were still lacking in Iraq at the beginning of 2009.[12]

A year later the displacement situation was relatively unchanged, with the total numbers of displaced remaining about the same, as the small numbers of returnees were

[9] Ibid, 47.
[10] Sassoon, 158.
[11] *Situation 1227 Report on Iraq*, Jan. 6, 2008.
[12] Sassoon, 158.

balanced by the small numbers of newly displaced.[13] Violence had decreased further, and a small majority of Iraqis believed the situation in their country was better than it had been the year before. These opinions still varied among the sects, as most Shi'is and Kurds believed conditions were either "very" or "quite" good, and a small majority of Sunnis felt they were either "very" or "quite" bad.[14]

Overall, the situation in Iraq continues to move in a positive direction, as the latest figures show the violence continuing to drop and the economy continuing to grow.[15] However, most Iraqis remain skeptical, as a majority of the population believes the country is heading in the wrong direction and that its economic condition is bad. They do seem to have faith in the political process, as 61 percent approve of their government, and most Iraqis agree that the security situation has improved over the last year.[16] Displaced Iraqis seem more skeptical than those who were not forced to flee. Of the roughly 2 million who have fled since 2003, only 100,000 have returned, and most cannot earn enough to support their families and regret going back.[17]

The displacement of Iraqis thus appears in danger of becoming a protracted situation, and it risks undermining the very real gains that Iraq has experienced over the past few years. Protracted displacement can lead to desperation and increased sectarianism and makes the messages of extremists more appealing. It can also add to the resentment of the local population, either Iraqis who can no longer bear the burden of

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[13] UNHCR, *Country Operations Profile: Iraq*, April 2011, www.unhcr.org; O'Hanlon and Ian Livingston, *Iraq Index: Tracking Variables of Reconstruction and Security in Post-Saddam Iraq*, The Brookings Institution, Jan. 25, 2010, http://www.brookings.edu/iraqindex, 25-6.

[14] O'Hanlon and Livingston, 3, 42.

[15] O'Hanlon and Livingston, *Iraq Index: Tracking Variables of Reconstruction and Security in Post-Saddam Iraq*, The Brookings Institution, Feb. 25, 2011, http://www.brookings.edu/iraqindex, 3, 29.

[16] Ibid., 32-33.

[17] Ibid., 20.

hosting IDPs or Syrians or Jordanians who perceive refugees as the source of their financial problems. Economic and political development are also complicated by displacement as significant numbers of the professional class necessary for rebuilding remain outside Iraq.[18] It is thus in the interest of the US not only to respond to the displacement of Iraqis as a humanitarian concern, but also to recognize that this displacement complicates the goals it hopes to achieve as it completes its military withdrawal from Iraq.

Response of the Obama Administration

Whereas it would have been politically damaging for the Bush Administration to have acknowledged publicly the extent of the displacement problem in Iraq, the Obama Administration was not under the same constraints in early 2009. Obama had been a vocal critic of the war since the build up to the invasion in 2003, and when he became president, he had inherited the situation in Iraq that Bush had largely created. Public statements regarding the difficulties that displacement created for the US would thus not have been admissions of his own failings, but frank assessments of his predecessor's shortcomings. However, these difficulties remain either unacknowledged or simply misunderstood. The Obama Administration has continued and expanded the Bush Administration's policies toward displaced Iraqis and continues to approach the displacement problem strictly as a matter of humanitarian concern.

The Obama Administration does seem to have different goals in Iraq than the Bush Administration. Although public statements from administration officials continue

[18] Leenders, 9-11.

to mention the importance of protecting Iraq's democracy, the word "democracy" is conspicuously absent from most official policy statements. Under the Bush Administration, every quarterly report on the situation in Iraq stated that the ultimate goal of the US was to ensure that Iraq became a peaceful, united, secure and stable democracy. This has not been listed as a goal since Obama took office.[19] The administration seems to have recognized that in order to achieve some measure of success in Iraq and still follow the timetable for troop withdrawals, the US must scale back its goals and make them more realistic. Its stated goals are to promote security, stability and prosperity in Iraq and help it emerge as a force for stability and moderation in the region.[20] It does not seem to have considered the impact that continued displacement can have on these goals.

In an op-ed published during his presidential campaign, Obama pledged to "commit $2 billion to a new international effort to support Iraq's refugees,"[21] thus demonstrating his intention to provide humanitarian support for displaced Iraqis, and once in office, he acted upon this intention. By the end of March 2009, the State Department had announced around $150 million in new contributions to help displaced Iraqis, and this money was allocated for emergency relief supplies, water systems and mental health services for IDPs, and school reconstruction and mobile health units for Iraqi refugees in Syria and Jordan.[22] The administration has repeatedly voiced its commitment to providing displaced Iraqis with humanitarian assistance.[23]

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[19] See *Section 1227 Report*, Apr. 2009, Jul. 2009.

[20] Jeffrey.

[21] Barack Obama, "My Plan for Iraq," *The New York Times*, July 14, 2008, A17.

[22] US Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs, "U.S. Contributes More than $150 Million to Help Displaced Iraqis," Mar. 20, 2009.

[23] See *Section 1227 Report*, Jul. 2009; Christopher Hill, "An Assessment Before the March 17th Iraqi Elections," Foreign Press Center, Washington DC, Feb. 19, 2010; US Department of State, Bureau of

The Obama Administration has also coordinated with UNHCR and the Iraqi government to help prepare for the return of refugees and IDPs and expanded the resettlement programs begun under the Bush Administration.[24] While it acknowledges that the conditions are not yet in place for the large-scale return of refugees and IDPs, the Obama Administration emphasizes that "the long term U.S. strategy for Iraq's displaced it to help Iraq develop the capacity to reintegrate returning Iraqis into stable neighborhoods."[25]

In short, there are no fundamental differences between the Obama Administration's response to the displacement of Iraqis and the policies of the last few years of the Bush Administration. The US has clearly moved away from the "securitization of asylum seekers" and adopted policies that treat displaced Iraqis as the victims of violence rather than potential perpetrators of it.[26] The emphasis on the humanitarian concerns surrounding displaced Iraqis is thus a welcome change from the Bush's Administration's response throughout 2006. However, by responding to displacement strictly as a humanitarian concern, the US neglects other dimensions of the problem that have important implications for Iraq's future.

In her discussion of why "nonhumanitarian actors" should pay attention to the displaced, Ferris stresses the importance of understanding the impact of displacement on Iraq's security, politics and economy. Despite the widespread concern that Iraqi refugees would export their country's sectarian violence, Reinoud Leenders has demonstrated that

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Population, Refugees, and Migration, "Protecting Vulnerable Populations: The Role of the State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration," Jun. 4, 2010.

[24] *Section 1227 Report on Iraq*, Apr. 2009.

[25] US Department of State, US Department of Homeland Security, US Department of Health and Human Services, *Proposed Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2010*, 45.

[26] Berman, 14.

the real security threats caused by displacement occur within Iraq. As neighborhoods have become more homogenized as a result of displacement, radical groups have increased the territory under their control and have thus become greater threats to the security and stability of the country.[27] In a more general sense, Iraq's changed sectarian geography also reinforces sectarian identities and risks entrenching sectarian politics.[28] Many homes have been occupied illegally, creating uncertainty and the potential for increased instability if their owners return and attempt to reclaim them.[29]

Political and economic development suffer from the fact that large numbers of Iraqi professionals remain outside the country. Their displacement has been described as a "flight of moderation" by Samir Shankir Sumayda'i, Iraq's ambassador to the US, because of their perceived potential to act as a moderating force in Iraqi politics.[30] The longer they remain outside the country, the more detached they become from daily life inside Iraq and the more difficult it will be for them to integrate into the emerging post-Saddam Iraqi society.[31] The absence of significant numbers of the professional class also deprives Iraq of human capital and the expertise necessary for reconstruction and economic development.[32]

The US is clearly aware that Iraq remains insecure, that its economy remains underdeveloped, that reconstruction is proceeding slowly and that its political system would benefit from a bit of moderation. It has also stated several times that its long-term goal for the displacement problem is to create the conditions necessary for displaced

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[27] Ferris, 15.
[28] Leenders, 12.
[29] Ibid., 12.
[30] Leenders, 9.
[31] Ibid., 10.
[32] Ibid., 10-11; Ferris, 16.

Iraqis to return voluntarily. However, the fact that it has responded to displacement as a purely humanitarian concern suggests either that it does not understand, or that is it unwilling to acknowledge, the relationship between displacement and the various other problems in Iraq that it has a strong interest in resolving.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Three key points have emerged from this analysis of the US response to the displacement of Iraqis. The first is that, unsurprisingly, this response is determined largely by politics. In the first several months after Saddam Hussein was overthrown, voluntary repatriations far outnumbered new displacements, a fact to which the US drew attention because it enabled it to claim not only that it had been right to invade Iraq and that it was succeeding in its goal of building a democratic Iraq but also that by returning, Iraqis were demonstrating that they shared the American vision for a new Iraq and that they believed America would succeed. However, if returning Iraqis were casting votes of confidence in their country's future, fleeing ones were casting votes of no-confidence, so when the trend of repatriations began to reverse in late 2005/early 2006, rather than drawing attention to this fact, the US continued to insist that conditions in Iraq were such that repatriation was possible and that it expected most displaced Iraqis would voluntarily return. This changed only when it became more politically damaging to ignore the problem than to acknowledge it.

The second point is that security concerns have also played a key role in the US response to the displacement problem. Fairly early on, the US recognized that it had a special obligation to protect displaced Iraqis who had worked with or helped the US in

some way and had thus become targets of violence. The obvious solution was to resettle them and their families in the US, and this eventually happened for many Iraqis, although the process initially moved very slowly. This was due mostly to the new immigration rules implemented after the 9/11 terrorist attacks that either disqualified Iraqis from receiving asylum or resulted in a lengthy review process lasting several months. The process was also hampered by the fact that until 2008, security procedures prevented Iraqis from applying for resettlement at the US embassy in Iraq, requiring them to leave the country to apply for resettlement, even if they had been employed by the US.

It is understandable that national security would be an important factor when considering Iraqis for resettlement, but this approach, which treated displaced Iraqis as potential terrorists rather than as victims of violence, resulted in the "securitization" of the displacement problem and a rather inhuman treatment of refugees and IDPs.[1] Moreover, although the US has expressed concern that Iraqi refugees will export their country's sectarian violence, it does not seem to have understood that the real security threat from displacement is in Iraq itself.

The third point to emerge from this study is that the US has responded to displacement as a purely humanitarian problem. While the emphasis on providing humanitarian relief is obviously a welcome change from the Bush Administration's initial refusal to acknowledge the problem at all, it has produced a one-dimensional response to a multidimensional problem. The US is clearly aware that Iraq remains unstable, that its politics are dysfunctional and that it lacks the necessary human capital to grow its economy and complete reconstruction projects. However, although each of these

[1] Berman, 11.

problems is closely related to displacement, the US does not seem to have accepted this fact.

This is not to deny the complexity of the displacement problem, as it is not entirely clear what more the US could do. However, a start would be an open acknowledgement of the scale of the problem. The Rand Corporation's report for the Department of Defense recognizes that while displacement is primarily a humanitarian concern, it has other dimensions as well. It thus emphasizes that the US "must recognize the displacement crisis for what it is: a long-term development challenge for Iraq and the region."[2] Recognizing this fact would also involve an open acknowledgement that the displacement of Iraqis makes it difficult for the US to achieve its goals in Iraq, but this is unlikely because it would be so politically damaging.

The Bush Administration was able to contain some of the political fallout from Iraq's displacement problem by acknowledging it and treating it as a humanitarian issue. President Obama had the opportunity to blame the displacement problem on his predecessor, recognize the full scale of the problem and then present himself as cleaning up his predecessor's mess. Whether he had already pointed out too many of Bush's messes or if he simply did not grasp the multiple dimensions of the problem, he chose to continue the policies implemented in the last few years of the Bush presidency. Now, as he must devote his attention to a wide range of domestic problems, a continuing war in Afghanistan, an intervention in Libya, and the widespread general unrest in the Middle East, while also beginning his reelection campaign, President Obama is not in a position to highlight any complications in Iraq that might deepen American involvement there as

[2] Oliker, et al., 20.

the date for the final withdrawal quickly approaches. It thus seems that for the foreseeable future, the US will continue treating the displacement problem as a strictly humanitarian problem. It will continue providing displaced Iraqis with much needed humanitarian assistance, but it will also fail to grasp the multiple dimensions of the displacement problem and miss opportunities to develop a comprehensive response that could both help the US achieve its goals in Iraq and add to the likelihood that Iraq will eventually emerge as a prosperous stable democracy.

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